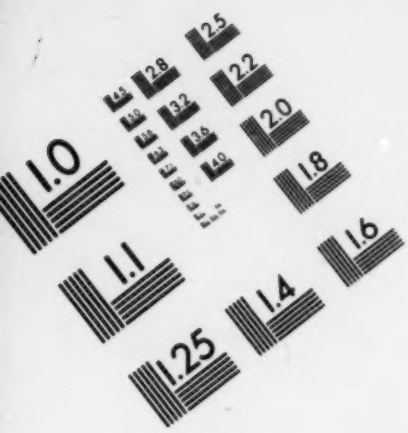

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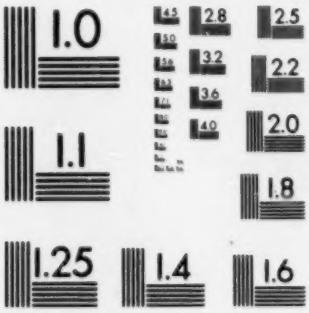


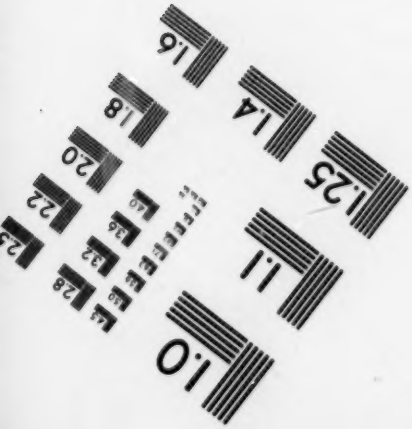


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# PERCEPTIONS OF TEACHERS AND PRINCIPALS IN REGARD TO EDUCATIONAL REFORMS IN TEXAS

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# PERCEPTIONS OF TEACHERS AND PRINCIPALS IN REGARD TO EDUCATIONAL REFORMS IN TEXAS

During the decade of the 1980's a great deal of attention was focused on our public schools. The "Nation at Risk" report published by the National Commission on Excellence in Education was one of several national studies citing the problems in our society and our apparent inability to compete with other industrialized nations. Almost universally, these reports found fault with our current educational system and called for sweeping changes.

The reform movement that grew out of this concern has resulted in important changes in the school system of Texas. The Governor's Select Committee on Education made recommendations, many of which were incorporated into House Bills 246 and 72 of the Texas legislature. Examples of these "reforms" include literacy testing of teachers (TECAT), a teacher appraisal system, a "career ladder" for teachers, student competency testing (TEAMS and TAAS), and "no pass no play" regulations for students participating in interscholastic activities.

All of these changes were mandated by the legislature and many of them evoked negative reactions from many members of the profession. The Texas Education Agency devised the evaluation system, contracted the development of the various tests, and provided in-service activities for teachers and administrators. Although teachers were involved in the development of the tests and the field testing of the appraisal system, none of these changes emanated from the ranks of the profession.

The lack of involvement of practicing professionals in the changes that have occurred may have resulted in negative feelings about the reforms and a resulting lowering of morale. Obversely, teachers and principals may be supportive of the changes. It was the purpose of this study to determine the perceptions of teachers and principals in the public schools of Texas toward selected aspects of the reform legislation.

A survey instrument was developed which included ten items related to possible problems resulting from the educational reforms. The respondents were asked to indicate whether the problems were negligible, moderate, serious, or critical concerns of teachers. Before analyzing the data, the responses of serious and critical were combined into a single category identified as "serious." This survey instrument was mailed to a random sample of 862 teachers and 469 principals stratified by geographic area, size of school and school level during February and March of 1991. A total of 413 teachers (48%) and 219 principals (47%) returned the instrument.

The rank order of the problems according to both teachers and principals are presented in the following table. The table also indicates the percentage of teachers and principals who perceived each problem to be serious.


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## TEXAS EDUCATIONAL REFORMS: PROBLEMS REPORTED SERIOUS BY TEACHERS AND PRINCIPALS

| Problems | Teachers (N=413) | | Principals (N=219) | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Rank Order | Percent | Rank Order | Percent |
| Requiring the TEAMS test or the TAAS test has influenced teachers to teach for the test too much. | (1) | 74 | (1) | 56 |
| The amount of paper work required by the new educational reforms has had a negative influence on teacher effectiveness. | (2)* | 69 | (2) | 54 |
| Teachers are under much stress due to the teacher appraisal system. | (2)* | 69 | (3) | 55 |
| Teacher morale has been negatively affected by the requirements necessary for the career ladder. | (4) | 60 | (4) | 47 |
| Requirements of the TEAMS test or the TAAS test for students have had a negative influence on the overall educational development of students. | (5) | 55 | (5) | 46 |
| The Texas Teacher Appraisal System tends to stifle creativity in teacher's classrooms. | (6) | 54 | (7) | 34 |
| Teachers feel handicapped by pressure resulting from the essential elements. | (7) | 44 | (8) | 32 |
| Cooperation between and among faculty members has been handicapped by competition for the career ladder. | (8) | 40 | (9) | 28 |
| Requirements to spend time on memory work included in the essential elements limits the time teachers can spend on higher level thinking skills. | (9) | 38 | (6) | 46 |
| Teachers feel threatened by the pressures brought about in their classes due to the "no pass, no play" rule in interscholastic activities. | (10) | 20 | (10) | 14 |

* Tie

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Several interesting conclusions may be drawn from the data derived from this study. One of these is that a higher percentage of teachers than principals perceive that the reforms have caused problems. On only one item did a higher percentage of principals indicate that the problem was serious. This was the item related to the amount of time spent on memory work related to the essential elements and its possible effect on teaching higher level thinking skills.

On six of the items more than half of the teachers indicated that a serious problem existed while on only three of the items did more than half of the principals perceive a serious problem. It may be that the further one is removed from the classroom the less negatively the reforms are viewed or that different priorities between principals and teachers influence their perceptions.

Another observation is that there was considerable agreement between teachers and principals as to the relative importance of the problems. The rank order that each group placed the problems in was very close with the exception of one item. The teachers appear to be more concerned about the possibility of the teacher appraisal stifling creativity than do principals. The two items with the greatest disparity between teachers and principals are the items related to the effect of the standardized tests on teaching and the effect of the TAAS on teaching creativity. Apparently, principals perceive the intent of these mandates differently than teachers.

The reform that has received the most attention from the press and the courts was the "no pass no play" rule that regulates interscholastic participation. This was perceived as relatively unimportant by both teachers and principals. This was also true when the data included only high school teachers and principals.

Data from this study seem to indicate that there are considerable negative perceptions among both teachers and principals related to the "reforms" in education in the state of Texas. It appears that we are embarking on yet another wave of reforms. The failure rate on the TAAS was much higher than on the TEAMS. Since the types of items on the TAAS attempts to measure higher level thinking, this will call for changed methodology and changed materials to prepare students for the tests. The school finance controversy will have important implications for educational practice. It is important that legislators, judges, school board members, and other policy makers should begin to develop ways to meaningfully involve teachers and principals if the changes are to be effectively implemented in the schools.

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